

Message Text

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73

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

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R 301655Z AUG 74

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT UNDER FIRE FOR "BENIGN NEGLECT" OF NORTH

SUMMARY: GOI "LOW-PROFILE" POLICY TOWARD NORTHERN IRELAND IS DRAW-
ING HEAVY PUBLIC CRITICISM AND APPEARS TO BE CREATING SUBSTANTIAL
PROBLEMS. THERE ARE RUMORS OF DEEP CABINET SPLIT. END SUMMARY.

1. MICHAEL O'KENNEDY, FOREIGN POLICY SPOKESMAN OF OPPOSITION
FIANNA FAIL PARTY, MADE STRONG SPEECH AUGUST 24 AGAINST GOVT'S
NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY. GIST OF CRITICISM WAS THAT NO ONE KNOWS
WHAT THE POLICY IS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT. O'KENNEDY ACCUSED PM
COSGRAVE OF MOCKING CONCEPT OF OPEN GOVERNMENT BY REFUSING TO DIS-
CLOSE HIS VIEWS. FIANNA FAIL, O'KENNEDY CONTINUED, IS NOT INT-
ERESTED IN "BIPARTISAN SILENCE" (A REFERENCE TO "BIPARTISAN" NI
POLICY WHICH SUPPOSEDLY PREVAILS). REFERRING TO A WELL-PUBLICIZED
RUMORED CABINET SPLIT OVER NI POLICY, O'KENNEDY SAID "IF THE
TAOISEACH HAS ORDAINED A PERIOD OF SILENCE FOR DR. CRUISE-O'BRIEN
IN RECENT TIMES, THERE SEEMS NO REASON WHY HE SHOULD IMPOSE THE
SAME RESTRICTION ON HIMSELF." O'KENNEDY ALSO SUGGESTED THAT
BRITISH GOVT NOW FEELS FREE TO IGNORE INDECISIVE VIEWS FROM
DUBLIN.

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2. ON AUGUST 26, DEPUTY JOHN KELLY, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO

PM COSGRAVE, MADE A REPLY NOT ONLY TO O'KENNEDY BUT TO SIMILAR CRITICISMS FROM NEWSPAPER COMMENTATORS AND FROM SDLP MEMBER PADDY DEVLIN (DUBLIN 1104). KELLY'S REBUTTAL USED UNUSUALLY STRONG LANGUAGE BUT, FOR THE MOST PART, WAS NOT SUBSTANTIVE. CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH, HOWEVER, IS MOST INTERESTING. KELLY SOUGHT TO PUT IN O'KENNEDY'S MOUTH REFERRED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT REPUBLIC HAD RESPONSIBILITY TO GUARANTEE SAFETY OF NI CATHOLICS. HE THEN SAID: "I AM SURE MR. O'KENNEDY WOULD THINK TWICE BEFORE HE URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO ASSENT PUBLICLY TO THIS PROPOSITION -- LET ALONE ITS COROLLARY, THAT WE OUGHT TO GO AHEAD AND CONSCRIPT 100,000 MEN AND SPEND A FEW HUNDRED MILLION POUNDS EQUIPPING THEM. THIS IS THE KIND OF GRIT THAT ANYONE TALKING ABOUT NORTHERN AFFAIRS MUST NOW CHEW; AND IF THE GOVERNMENT THINKS IT WISER NOT TO ADD TOO MANY PUBLIC WORDS IN THIS ATMOSPHERE, I THINK IT PERFECTLY RIGHT."

3. PRESS COMMENTARY ON DEBATE HAS GENERALLY ENDORSED IDEA THAT GOI SHOULD EXPLAIN ITS NI POLICY. MICHAEL MILLS IN "IRISH PRESS" REFERS TO GOI'S "BENIGN NEGLECT" OF NORTH. HE ALSO PUTS ON RECORD FOR FIRST TIME THAT MINISTER JUSTIN KEATING DISAGREES WITH NI POLICY OF LABOR COLLEAGUE CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN. THIS AND OTHER CABINET DIFFERENCES HAVE LONG BEEN RUMORED BUT NOT DESCRIBED EXPLICITLY IN PRESS.

4. COMMENT: JUDGING FROM SHARP TONE OF KELLY'S REBUTTAL STATEMENT, GOI IS BEGINNING TO SMART UNDER CRITICISM OF ITS POLICY-- OR LACK THEROF. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, GO SPOKESMAN HAS DESCRIBED "LOW-PROFILE" POLICY AS A THOUGHTFUL DUBLIN RESPONSE TO CURRENT NORTHERN UNCERTAINTIES. SOME MEMBERS OF CABINET -- NOTABLY CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN -- MAY ALSO BE CONVINCED THAT "LOW PROFILE" IS NECESSARY TO SOOTHE NI PROTESTANTS. BUT ONE GOOD FINE GAELE SOURCE TELLS US THERE DEFINITELY IS A CABINET SPLIT AND THAT IT IS SERIOUS. SAME SOURCE CONFIRMS MICHAEL MILLS' CLAIM THAT JUSTIN KEATING IS A LEADER OF THE RESISTANCE TO CRUISE-O'BRIEN. BOTH ARE IN THE LABOR PARTY, THUS THE SPLIT IS NOT ON PARTY LINES.

5. KELLY'S COMMENT ON MILITARY DIFFICULTY OF DEFENDING NORTHERN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY MAY ALSO BE A LARGE PART OF GOI WORRY. WE SURMISE THAT GOI HAS ANALYZED PROBLEM AND DECIDED TO RULE OUT THE

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POSSIBILITY OF GOI DEFENDING NORTHERN CATHOLICS IN CIVIL-WAR SITUATION. SINCE CABINET IS COMPOSED OF RESPONSIBLE MEN, IT PROBABLY THEN DECIDED THAT IT SHOULD NOT MISLEAD NI CATHOLICS. IN THIS DIFFICULT ISSUE, GOVERNMENT CONCERN SEEMS AMPLY JUSTIFIED.

6. GOVT'S "LOW-PROFILE" POLICY HAS CREATED SEVERAL PROBLEMS:

(A) THE POLICY HAS NOT BEEN EXPLAINED SATISFACTORILY TO PUBLIC, PERHAPS BECAUSE GOVT ITSELF CANNOT AGREE ON DETAILS.

(B) IT MAKES GOVT APPEAR TO BE NEGOTIATING FROM WEAKNESS ON NI PROBLEM (PERHAPS AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE OF GOVT'S BELIEF THAT IT LACKS MILITARY STRENGTH).

(C) IT IS UNDERCUTTING SDLP WITHOUT MAKING ANY APPARENT CORRESPONDING IMPACT ON PROTESTANT COMMUNITY.

(D) IT IS ENCOURAGING "ISOLATIONIST" TREND IN SOUTH, WHERE MUCH OF PUBLIC MAY HAVE ILLUSION THAT IT CAN IGNORE NI TROUBLES.

7. THERE IS A LOT WE DO NOT KNOW ABOUT CABINET SPLIT, SINCE MINISTERS HAVE BEEN CLOSE-MOUTHED. FROM RUMBLES WE ARE GETTING, HOWEVER, WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF IT ERUPTED IN PUBLIC IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
MOORE

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